

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA  
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# THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE POT: TWO MODELS OF AUTHORITY

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AUTHORITY

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Although authority, as a political system of governance, only came into practice in the Roman period, it was Plato who first envisioned it as a theory of rule – one where people obey willingly, reasoning that this will be as much for their benefit as for those with whom they share the state. Although some, with Karl Popper in evidence, accused the ideal state in the *Republic* of being tyrannical, the authoritarian principle behind the ideal state remains: to obey for the benefit of the state, which is the people who compose it. This is why Tolstoy, with Christian anarchism and the principle of non-violence, obstinately against figures of authority, is relevant to the discussion of authority. His attack on art, Christianity and political governance, and his battle for social re-organization reveal him as an authority figure. Against *unnatural* social organization, in favour of a society where men obey their *inner true* selves, Tolstoy, like many whom he criticized, embarks on a path toward securing authority. Plato's Philosopher King and Tolstoy's 'Alyosha the pot' are models of authority; what unites these two seemingly contradictory characters is what they represent in the body of work of their creators.

*É na era Romana que a autoridade é posta em prática, mas é Platão o primeiro a ambicionar um modelo de governação onde os cidadãos obedecem livremente – onde obedecer é benéfico para todos. Embora alguns, com Karl Popper em evidência, tenham rotulado o estado ideal na República de tirania, o princípio, tal como Platão o teorizou, mantém-se: obedecer para o benefício do estado, sendo que por estado entende-se todos os que o compõem. É por esta razão que Tolstoi, com o anarquismo Cristão e princípio de não-violência, é relevante para a discussão sobre autoridade. O ataque de Tolstoi ao cânone de arte, contra o Cristianismo regente e sistemas políticos existentes, o seu empenho por uma reorganização social e a sua posição irreconciliável contra figuras de autoridade, revelam-no como uma figura de autoridade. Contra qualquer organização da sociedade artificial, a favor de uma sociedade onde o homem obedece o ser interior, Tolstoi, tal como os que critica, entra num caminho, já percorrido por outros, em direcção à autoridade. O Filósofo Rei de Platão e 'Aliosha o pote' de Tolstoi são modelos de autoridade, o que une estes modelos aparentemente contraditórios é o que representam no trabalho de ambos os autores.*

Plato, Tolstoy, authority, society, power

*Platão, Tolstoi, autoridade, sociedade, poder*

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## Introduction

The decision to focus my thesis on Tolstoy and Plato derived from an early interest in the subject of authority. Hannah Arendt's *What is Authority?*, which provides a historical analysis on the subject, identified Plato as the father of the theory behind authority, in Arendt's words: "an obedience in which men retain their freedom" (105, Arendt). In the initial stage of research, Tolstoy came up as an example of an author with authority; an author whose work embodies the root of the word "author", *auctor*, from *auctoritas*, the Roman term for authority. As the Roman Senate had authority through a link with the foundation of the city of Rome, an author, as described by Walter Benjamin in *The Storyteller*, has a direct link with the land and a practical way of life. In this sense, Tolstoy was particularly relevant because he not only fit the profile of an author with authority, but also because he sought, through his non-fiction work, not perhaps practical political authority, but certainly authority to command a re-organization of society. In fact, it was through a comparative analysis of Tolstoy and Plato that the former aided my comprehension of the latter. Although I considered the possibility of writing a thesis on the contrast between Tolstoy and Plato on the subject of authority, in the end, for the sake of clarity, I opted for two separate essays on each author. This was done in the interest of not

overemphasizing the comparison at the risk of losing the individual analysis in the process; I considered their individual paths more interesting and fruitful than the comparison in itself.

It was in what I understood as similar attacks on tradition, that Tolstoy helped me to understand Plato. Although I later came to realize that Tolstoy's attack on Art is similar to his attack on Christianity, it was with the former, through the book *What is Art?*, that I first related Tolstoy to Plato. In *What is Art?* Tolstoy presents the canonical aesthetic evaluations in art, and then describes them as having been controlled by the idle higher classes, whose interest was solely to amuse themselves, to derive pleasure out of art, and not in any interest for Art-in-itself. In *What is Art?*, Tolstoy goes back one hundred years, establishes the canon of art, and then says it is, at the very least, misguided. Further investigation of Tolstoy's works evidenced an habitual pattern (patent in both *A Confession* and his introduction to *Gospel in Brief*): he often saturates the reader with historical information to the point of exhaustion – which also establishes him as an authority on the subject –, and then unceremoniously denies it, often backed by little more evidence than personal opinion. The text in *What is Art?* provides little argument to support Tolstoy's view of art as the transmission of feelings, his reply to the question posed in the title, other than 'because that is what it should be'. Why Art should be what he says and not what the canon has established it to be, is not an answer Tolstoy is able to provide. If anything, the canon, which he attempts to erode, is actually justified in that, without it, he would be left with a void wherein his definition of art would prove unfounded. The lack of argument to defend his art, and the attack on the canon helped me



understand that Tolstoy's book is less a redefinition of art than an attack on tradition. This led me to Plato and his attack on the poets.

Like Tolstoy, Plato also believed in the power of art to infect. Unlike Tolstoy who commends its power to unite all Men, Plato perceived it as dangerous: art is too powerful and has the capacity to lead people astray from what Plato called the truth. Tolstoy, maybe because he is less subtle about it, helped me understand Plato's attack on the poets as a subversion of tradition. In the *Republic*, Socrates imposes a function on transcendence, earlier the subject of art and artists, in his own text the criterion of truth. After a handful of examples of how poetry corrupts young children, Socrates states: "God is the cause, not of all things, but only of good" (380c). He refers to this statement as a law, a guideline to be followed by the poets in the Guardian state, and thus as a redefinition of the transcendent. Socrates cites Homer over twenty times after imposing this function of art as truth, establishing tradition to judge it under this new definition, allowing him to claim at the end: "since what they (poets) say now is neither true nor beneficial" (386C). What starts as an attack on the poets for a portrayal of gods that is harmful to the young ends with a description of the poets' work not as evil, but as untrue. Good, as opposed to evil, becomes the definition of truth. The relevant modification operated by Plato was the redefinition of the transcendent. It is appropriate that the first example of poetry cited by Socrates in Book II is that of the "foul story of Ouranos" (377e), the original supreme god who was deposed by Zeus, because what Socrates will do in this section of the *Republic* is similar – exchange one god for another. The world of gods, quarrelling over each other, is replaced by one statement: god is

good; anything against this statement is considered false. Like Tolstoy's attack on art, Plato's attack on the poets is a subversion of tradition.

A thesis comparing both authors could focus on their subversion of tradition, but especially in Tolstoy's case, the purpose behind this undertaking became the subject of this thesis. If Plato, when writing the *Republic*, was doing something new, a political system based on authority, Tolstoy's case was not as clear. One of the many aspects that separate Tolstoy and Plato is their view on figures of authority; contrary to Plato, Tolstoy refutes figures of authority, but he does not – it seems, at times, unbeknownst to him – refute authority. In fact, and these initial assumptions resulted from reading Plato and Tolstoy side by side, Tolstoy's body of work is, in itself, an attempt at securing authority. To defend this view of Tolstoy, Plato's authority had first to be defined and defended. The decision to use Karl Popper's attack on Plato as expressed in his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* rests on the view that Popper's charge of Plato's *ideal* state as tyrannical (thus not authoritarian), in the form that it is expressed, is unfounded. To use Plato as the starting point to define authority and understand Tolstoy's particular form of authority, then Popper's assertions needed to be refuted. The refutation of Popper's argument serves as the defence of Plato's authority. Gregory Vlastos' body of work, his particular defence of Plato against Popper and his general view of Plato's work, proved very useful for this purpose.

As an introduction the preceding considerations will probably suffice, but there is one more aspect of the relationship between Plato and Tolstoy, one that surfaced while writing the essay on Tolstoy, that I would like to add. One of Popper's initial positions is the claim that Plato attempted to protect the aristocratic class through the elaboration of the *ideal* state (in fact, he is

protecting philosophers). Popper's main contention here is that Plato was himself an aristocrat. This leads Popper to view the *ideal* state as a backward state, one that had existed before, a tribal system with an unchallenged and unchallengeable rule by one class over another. As for the political stability of the *ideal* state, it is certainly one of Plato's main goals, although, as I will show in the essay on Plato, not in itself a regression, but an advance in political theory. Where Popper's analysis becomes relevant to Tolstoy is that, in the latter's case, there is a clear defence of one social class over another, not his own, but that of the peasants. This is why Popper's analysis of Plato reverberated through my own analysis of Tolstoy. Popper approaches Plato with suspicion and sees, in the *ideal* state, a tyranny in camouflage. I sensed that Popper was never really able to free himself from his proposition that an aristocratic like Plato would always attempt to protect his *own* in detriment of the lower classes. This accusation would fit Tolstoy better, an aristocrat that, to defend the peasants, dismissed his own class. While Plato protects the philosophers by creating a state where he believed all could benefit, Tolstoy protects the peasants through a state where all become peasants. In the latter case, it seems justified to analyze the end result with suspicion.

## **The Philosopher's Authority in the *Republic***

To identify the source of the philosopher's authority in Plato's *Republic*, it is necessary to understand justice in the ideal state. In his book, *The Open Society and its Enemies: Plato*, Karl Popper labels the *Republic's* form of justice authoritarian. In a totalitarian state there is no authority, only coercion. Popper's view of justice in the *Republic* is an obstacle to the identification of authority in the *Republic*, which must be surpassed to guarantee the purpose of this essay. To aid me in this task I will use the works of Gregory Vlastos, much of it directed specifically against Popper.

One of Popper's main justifications that justice in the *Republic* is totalitarian is the portrayal of the ideal state as distinct and superior to the individuals. This is a main characteristic of a totalitarian state, succinctly expressed in the Nazi slogan: Right is what benefits the state. In a totalitarian state the individual serves the state, not the state the individual. To defend this view of Plato's ideal state, Popper resorts to Socrates' initial argument for the origin of a city: "I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient" (369B). Individuals gather in groups to survive and that which they create is superior to them because it ensures their basic subsistence. Popper classifies the

organization of this 'superior state' an "organic society" (73, Popper), where citizens are placed 'organically' where they belong; the opposite of what Popper terms an 'open society' – his standard and comparison – where there is class struggle which enables individual citizens to strive for a 'better life' within the state. An organic society is characterized by strict class division and is compared by Popper to a human body, where the foot may not attempt to become the head, or the head the foot; where each body part (i.e. class) depending on all the others to become one whole strives to protect this superior being which allows the parts to survive. The relationship between the classes in a 'closed' society is not through "abstract social relationships as division of labour and exchange of commodities," as in an 'open' society', "but by concrete physical relationships such as touch, smell, and sight" (173, Popper).

There are two main premises used by Popper to defend the principle of the *Republic's* ideal state as a "natural unit of a higher order" (180, Popper): (a) Because the state is a whole that guarantees livelihood, then it must be superior to those whose livelihood it ensures, and (b) the origin of the state as a conventionalist social contract.

(a) Popper claims that Plato sees the state as a "perfect individual, and the individual citizen, accordingly, as an imperfect copy of the state" (79, Popper). Plato, Popper defends, never explicitly defends this theory but it is thoroughly implied in his search for the definition of justice. One of his arguments for the state as superior to the individual in the *Republic* is what he sees as a mistaken "fundamental analogy" (79, Popper), between state and individual. This analogy is professed by Socrates when deciding whether to begin his inquiry on justice

with the state or with the individual. Socrates chooses to begin with the state, “let’s first find out what sort of thing justice is in the city and afterwards look for it in the individual”(369D), and the reasoning behind it Popper calls a mistaken “fundamental analogy”, inferring that Socrates claims: “The city, it is said, is greater than the individual and therefore easier to examine” (79, Popper). This view is taken as proof of the state’s superiority to the individual: “This view, I think, is fully in accordance with his doctrine that the individual is lower than the state...” The continuation of the passage above from the *Republic* (369D) where Socrates chooses to begin with the state reads, “...observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger.” A look at how Popper reads the entire passage is the key to understand his assertion. Popper<sup>1</sup> includes the passage he is referring to in the Notes to the text where in Popper's translation Socrates justifies his decision to begin his investigation of justice in the city: “And a city is greater than a single man?” This could be a translation issue – ‘greater’ and ‘larger’ have, in some instances, similar meanings – a closer look at the entire passage in the *Republic*, though, reveals that ‘greater’ can only mean ‘larger’ and never, superior: “We should adopt the method of investigation that we’d use if lacking keen eyesight, we were told to read small letters from a distance and then noticed that the same letters existed elsewhere in a larger size and on a larger surface. We’d consider it godsend, I think to be allowed to read the larger ones first and then to examine the smaller ones” (368D). Socrates’ decision to investigate the city before the individual is supported by the simple deduction

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<sup>1</sup> Popper relies mainly on F.M. Cornford’s translation, but in this particular passage does not quote directly from it. I use G.M.A. Grube’s translation as revised by C.D.C. Reeve.

that what is larger is easier to examine than what is smaller. It is troubling that Popper bases his defence of a superior state, in part, on this passage of which he says: this is “the very place in which Plato introduces his fundamental analogy” (79, Popper). It is still worth reviewing Gregory Vlastos argument against Popper regarding point (a).

Essential to maintaining a concept of the state as superior is to prove its difference from the individual. In the paper, “The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's *Republic*,” Vlastos points to another difficulty in Popper's translation from the *Republic* to defend the view that no such distinction exists in the *Republic*. In response to Popper's assertion that “Plato says frequently that what he is aiming at is neither the happiness of the individuals nor that of any particular class in the state, but only the happiness of the whole” (169, Popper), Vlastos argues that Plato never infers from ‘happiness of individuals’ the happiness of *all* the individuals as a whole, a unit. The main point of dispute between the two authors is what each of them understands the *polis* in the ideal state to be. While Popper's understanding of the *Republic* construes it as a totalitarian view, with the characteristics that such a system of governance entails, Vlastos claims that to define a *polis* is more than identifying a particular regime – it is to understand how this concept fits into Plato's moral ontology. “If his definition of justice,” Vlastos writes, “is to keep faith with his central intuition, the *polis* whose happiness and excellence is the end of all just conduct within its frontiers can be nothing but the people themselves who are its members – all of them in all their institutionalized interrelations” (80, Vlastos,

SPT). There are passages, Vlastos admits, which “spin yarn” (80, Vlastos, SPT) for Popper's view of the ideal state, but there is one instance where Socrates makes clear what he means when he speaks of justice in the *polis*. This passage is of importance because Popper uses it to defend his interpretation of the state as a superior, distinct “super-individual” (76, Popper). Below is Vlastos’ translation (519e1-520a2, *Republic*):

You have forgotten, my friend, that it is not the law’s concern to secure superior happiness for a single class in the state, but to contrive this in the whole *polis*, harmonizing the citizens by persuasion and compulsion, making them impart *to one another*, the benefit which each of them can bring to the community.

The first half of this passage defends Popper's view of a superior, distinct state in the *Republic*, in Plato's concern for the happiness not of single classes (or individuals), but of the state as a whole. The second half of the passages, though, makes clear what is meant by “whole *polis*,” which Vlastos says, explains why Popper omits it. The key words, italicized by Vlastos, are “*one another*.” By including *one another* Plato clearly states that the beneficiaries of “superior happiness” are the people who compose the community: the whole *polis* is the individuals that inhabit it, happiness is maximized through their interrelations and its beneficiaries are each other. Such passages defending individuals as the main beneficiaries of the ideal state are contrary to Popper's view of the ideal state as totalitarian, and insofar as this one is conclusive, many others, as Vlastos admits, may not be. That Popper would use this particular passage to defend his



views, omitting part of it, shows that other passages may not be as conclusive to defend his views as Vlastos concedes they may be.

(b) Another of Popper's view of justice in the *Republic* and what it represents in the ideal state is his view of the origin of the *polis* as a conventionalist social contract. Returning to Socrates' description of the origin of the state – “I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient” (369B) –, Popper writes, “Thus the inhabitants gather in order that each may further his own interest.” The consequence of such a state, based on what Popper calls conventionalist contract theory<sup>2</sup>, would be one where every man participates in the division of labour to survive, without any concern for each other; a state where each man participates out of self-interest (survival). To counter this view of the state it is necessary to point out *where*, in the *Republic*, Socrates describes the state in this manner. Vlastos argues that, at this point, the state is not yet a *polis* as Plato understands this concept. It is a state where each member of society achieves a level of specialization that benefits all, including himself, in that more goods and services are produced, but is still a state where men gather solely for economic self-sufficiency<sup>3</sup>, where there is no “planned foresight of the common good and hence [...] no possibility of extending the area of mutually beneficent give and take into the higher reaches of well being” (79, Vlastos, SPT). Glaucon labels a society assembled for the sole purpose of maximizing goods, “cheeses, boiled roots, chicken peas and acorn” as “a city for pigs” (372D). It is from a description

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<sup>2</sup> I am using “conventionalist contract theory” in the way Popper defends the ideal state to be. The purpose of this argument is merely to defend that the premise used by Popper to label the ideal state a conventionalist social contract is not applicable in the *Republic*, not to debate the concept itself.

<sup>3</sup> Although the passage following Socrates' description of the origin of the city based on the lack of self-sufficiency of man (369c) is followed by “people gather in a single place to live together as *partners* and *helpers*,” which though not conclusive is contrary to Popper's view of a state based solely on self-interest.

of this 'city for pigs' that Popper basis his view of the ideal state as a conventionalist social contract, while Vlastos claims that by altering his view of the *polis* due to Glaucon's objection, Socrates constructs a city where "there is a centrally planed pursuit of common good," differing from the initial conception of a city only fit for survival. The new post-Glaucon draft is one in which "all may be both burden-bearers and benefit-reapers according to their individual capacity for work and enjoyment" (79, Vlastos, SPT), while the first pre-Glaucon protest is a city where all have only survival and benefits in mind. Popper's view of the conventionalist contract theory of the ideal state would not include a common pursuit or the explicit acceptance of both the benefits and burdens of living in a community, which is integral to the construction of Plato's ideal state.

Vlastos' point is correct, but there was no need to go so far in the *Republic* to prove Popper wrong. Socrates had rejected this view long before the conception of a city began. When Popper writes that, "the social nature of man has its origins in the *imperfection of the human individual*" (76, Popper), he is defending a view very similar to Trasymachus' in Book I. His argument is that the individual's lack of self-sufficiency leads him to subjugate others "if for nothing else, then for having the dirty work, the manual work, done by them" (76, Popper). A closer look at Trasymachus' argument for justice in the state (339A) reveals that Socrates had already dismissed a state where each participates to further his own interest with no view for a common purpose. Trasymachus argues that all forms of government, democratic, tyrannical, or oligarchical, exist for the sole purpose of defending their own self-interest, portraying a just government as the rule of the stronger party. In the type of government expounded by Trasymachus, in a government that makes laws according to its

self-interest and declares them just, the description of justice is that the rulers rule to their own advantage. In reply to Trasymachus, Socrates does not question the ruler's right to rule, but the proposition that they do it solely for 'their own advantage'. Socrates dismisses Trasymachus' argument for this type of justice in the state by showing how 'to their own advantage', without any other goal other than maximizing benefits and with no clear knowledge of what is actually advantageous, prone to error in judgement, will reveal a concept of justice in the city where "it is just to do not only what is to the advantage of the stronger, but also the opposite, what is not to their advantage" (339D). Popper's view did not, of course, materialize out of thin air, as there is a clear subjugation of one class by another in the ideal state. The main element of dispute between Popper and Vlastos is how they view justice in the *Republic*. I will begin with Popper's totalitarian justice, where justice only pays to the ruling class, and then proceed to Vlastos' view of justice in the *Republic*.

Popper opens the chapter entitled "Totalitarian Justice" (86, Popper) by presenting two fundamental requirements, which he believes to be at the core of Plato's political programme. The first is "*Arrest all political change!*"; change is evil and rest is divine. The second rehearses the method of fulfilling the first: How to arrest all change? By returning to nature: "*Back to nature!*", back to the original state of our forefathers. From these demands, Popper infers two principal elements in Plato's ideal state, "the strict division of the classes" and "the identification of the state with that of the ruling class" (86, Popper). In Popper's analysis of Plato, justice only pays to the ruling class, which would collapse Plato's whole conception of the *polis* as a group of people united by a common purpose. In Popper's view the state serves to advance the cause of its

rulers (who are the state); justice pays for them, but not for the rest of the population. Popper's understanding of totalitarian Justice is derived from his analysis of the Theory of Forms. Much of the evidence derives from other works by Plato, which I will mention but not discuss in this essay (how Popper applies it to the *Republic* constitutes ample evidence to the flaws in his theory). What I will show is that Popper's view of Plato attempting to 'arrest all change' by going 'back to nature' does not apply to the *Republic*.

Popper accuses Plato of being a historicist and his first evidence originates from a historicist analysis of Plato, the man. Born to an aristocratic family and spending his formative years in a time of social turmoil, Plato was well accustomed to change. The ancient tribal patriarchy that had protected his social class was in its final throes; in its aftermath there were successive oligarchic and democratic governments responsible for much of the instability of the times. This leads Popper to attribute to Plato, on the premise of a passage from *Seventh Letter*, the belief that "*all social change is corruption or decay or degeneration*" (19, Popper). "This fundamental historical law forms, in Plato's view, part of a cosmic law – of a law which holds for all created things or generated things" (19, Popper). The problem with this historicist view is that if everything is in flux than there can be no knowledge. So, Popper argues, Plato could not be a pure historicist, because, contrarily to Heraclitus (who, according to Popper, is a strong historicist influence on Plato), he believed that by a superhuman effort decay can be reversed, that change can be arrested, a view which finally led him to develop his Theory of Forms. Popper contends that Plato was partly historicist in his belief that everything generates decays, part social engineer by defending that this change can be reversed. The ideal state is thus

defined as the perfect state, a system of governance where change is arrested. This leads Popper to the following definition of the Theory of Forms: "He [Plato] believed that to every kind of ordinary or decaying thing there corresponds also a perfect thing that does not decay" (21, Popper). This 'perfect thing' is a Form.

"The Form was the accountable representative of the sensible things, and could therefore be consulted in important questions concerning the world of flux" (30, Popper). The Forms allowed Plato to have knowledge; they are the essence (or the virtue) of sensible things. According to Popper, in *Timaeus* Forms are referred to as being the 'father' of sensible things. This reference becomes relevant for Popper to call the Forms primogenitors – which denotes time, historical change, or "a starting point"<sup>4</sup>. The Forms are understood as what preserves the essence of things, and time what degenerates. This view is mainly taken from other works written by Plato and are brought over from them to defend conclusions regarding the *Republic*. Popper's difficulty lies in adapting this theory to what Plato says of the Forms in the *Republic*. He does this by quoting a passage from the *Republic* (608e) where Socrates speaks of the 'good' as "everything that preserves". Popper writes, "The Forms or Ideas are not only unchanging, indestructible, and incorruptible, but also perfect, true, real and good; in fact, 'good' is once, in the *Republic*, explained as 'everything that preserves', and 'evil' everything that destroys or corrupts. The perfect and good Forms or Ideas [...] are something like primogenitors or starting points of all the changes in the world of flux" (35-36, Popper). Although Popper does not make a direct link between Socrates' definition of the good in this passage and the Form

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<sup>4</sup> From *Laws*, soul is described as "starting point of all motion" (895b) (217, Chapter 4 Note 2, Popper)

of Good, he clearly implies it. He is able to do this because such a claim is backed by his previous definition of Forms. This is done in chapter 4, "Nature and Convention", and only later in chapter 8, "The Philosopher King", referring to the same passage, does he admit that the "Good does not, however, seem here the Idea of Good [Popper uses 'Form' and 'Idea' interchangeably], but rather a property of things which makes them resemble the ideas" (146, Popper). When questioned on the Form of Good, Socrates admits his ignorance concerning what it is, but this does not prevent Popper from using a description of the good to define Forms in the *Republic*.

Popper's main source of proof from the *Republic* to this theory of Forms is Socrates' story of the imperfect states. This story, Popper claims, is a clear indication of Plato's view of time as degeneration. Of this story Popper remarks, "It is intended to describe both the original course of development by which the main forms of constitutional decay were first generated, and the typical course of social change" (40, Popper). Popper is aware that this is a controversial view: In the Notes (220 [Note 11], Popper) to this passage, Popper refutes criticisms that it is meant as a "dramatic presentation of a purely logical classification of constitutions," by arguing that it is in tune with "the whole spirit of Plato's logic." The problem with this view is that this controversial passage is not used by Popper as a logical conclusion of Plato's theory, but as integral (his main point regarding the *Republic*) proof that Plato has a sociological understanding of the world based on a historicist theory. His only support for this view, although Socrates speaks amply of the Forms in the *Republic*, derives, however, from other sources. In the story of imperfect states (544 ff.) Timocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny are referred to 'in order' of praise and disease, the first

being the most praised, the last the most diseased. Socrates will describe the demise of the imperfect states in chronological order, which renders manifest, according to Popper, his assertion of Plato's view of time in flux toward decay.

Although not alluding directly to Popper (but certainly with him in mind), in the article "The Rights of Persons in Plato's Conception of the Foundations of Justice," Vlastos argues against Plato's considering Oligarchy as better, or higher in praise, or less diseased, than Democracy. In this paper Vlastos argues against a literal interpretation of this passage. If historical development in Plato's theory were decay and degeneration, as Popper argues, then by describing Oligarchy as less decayed than Democracy, Plato would prefer the former to the latter. If Vlastos' argument proves true, then Popper's argument, which relies on a chronological order of decay of the imperfect states to support his theory, will fall. Vlastos' argument not only dispels this preference between states, but also Popper's view of the ideal state as secured by undivided and uncontested class rule (*versus* class integration).

Based on the story of imperfect states, and on Socrates' argument for their demise resulting exclusively from the ruling class, Popper argues that political conflict in the *Republic* is solved by maintaining the superiority of a master race, which as long as it is kept pure and superior will maintain stability in the state. Popper's view of Plato as solely defending divisive class rule leads him to contend that he would prefer Oligarchy, based solely on class rule, to Democracy, where there is substantive political equality. Vlastos' argument is in stark opposition to this view. He views justice in the *Republic*

based on impartiality, where members of all classes work together toward a common goal. Both Popper and Vlastos recognize Plato's preoccupation with class division; their premise is the same, where they differ is on their conception of how he solves it, of how Plato views justice in the state. In Vlastos' view, the ideal state is based not on a divisive, but on "an integrative class division" (114, Vlastos, SPT). Oligarchy is based on proportional equality (115, Vlastos, SPT), the greater benefit to the ones with greater merit, which allows the Oligarchs, due to their wealth and power, to claim greater merit for themselves. A Democracy is based on political substantive equality, "which distributes a sort of equality to both equals and unequals alike" (558c). Popper defends Plato's view of the superiority of oligarchy to democracy because it is a form of justice that is closer to his view of how justice works in the Republic, where one group rules another to its own advantage. He sees a chronology, of good to evil, a process of decay where the ideal state is at the top followed by Timocracy, then Oligarchy, then Democracy, each moving away from an ideal, losing Form as they all degenerate through time. Vlastos dismisses this because neither Democracy nor Oligarchy resemble what he understands as Plato's justice in ideal state. The ideal state is based on impartiality, where benefits are distributed according to optimal function. If rights and benefits were awarded according to merit (which would allow Oligarchs to claim more), then in the ideal state this would imply greater rights and benefits to Guardians – Plato is firmly against this. If benefits and rights were equal for all, as in Democracy, then the whole conception of the ideal state would fall, for all could claim right to rule. Both Democracy and Oligarchy are contrary to Plato's ideal state, each in



their own different way. To accept Oligarchy over Democracy would destroy the ideal state as much as accepting Democracy over Oligarchy would. Plato could not have preferred one to the other, which makes the story of imperfect states, as Popper admits his critics have argued, a “dramatic presentation of a purely logical classification of constitutions.”

Many of the views that Popper has defended on justice in the ideal state have been refuted in this essay, and they originate in his defence of Plato's two fundamental demands – ‘arrest all change’ and ‘back to nature’ – which reflect Popper's view of Plato as deeply influenced by historicism. The Theory of Forms is defended as a search for origin, a starting point, as Plato's solution to historicism's inability to provide knowledge. To arrive at this conclusion, Popper uses mainly *Laws* and *Timaeus* to provide a background of this description of the Forms, and uses these theories to analyze the *Republic*, having as his main defence of the applicability of these views in this work his analysis of the story of imperfect states. Whereas Vlastos uses his analysis of justice in the *Republic* to *not* view the story of the imperfect states as a literal classification of the value system of governance in Plato's thought, Popper, knowing a literal interpretation is contestable and controversial, uses the story of imperfect states to *prove* his analysis of the Theory of Forms and consequently of justice, or the lack thereof, in the *Republic*<sup>5</sup>.

Vlastos' Theory of Functional Reciprocity seeks to understand and explain how Plato understands one class should rule another. This will lead to Plato's view as to how justice pays in the *Republic*. The initial passage used by Vlastos to

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<sup>5</sup> I am not trying to defend that Popper completely misconstrued the Theory of the Forms. I am only referring to the *part* of his analysis that I am not in agreement with to emphasize how much it influenced his other views regarding the *Republic*.

defend his view of justice in the state as based on Functional Reciprocity is also used by Popper to defend strict class division as the basis of justice in the *Republic*. I will first show how Popper's interpretation is much too limited to understand justice, and then proceed to Vlastos' view. The crucial passage is the following: "Each single person pursuing that single practice pertaining to the *polis* which his own nature is best fitted to pursue" (433A5-6). From this Popper concludes, "the city is founded upon human nature, its needs, and its limitations" (90, Popper). When Socrates introduces this passage he asserts that although each person in the *polis* must pursue that which his nature best fits him to do, these functions are interchangeable within the producers' class, but not in between classes. Popper uses the principle of strict class division to offer the following conception of justice in the *polis*: "the state is just if the ruler rules, if the worker works, and if the slaves slave" (90, Popper). Comparing justice in the *Republic* with justice in an 'open society', he argues that *true* justice is not class privilege but exactly the opposite, the absence of such privilege. In an open society, people have a certain amount of rights, including the possibility of moving up in the ranks of society, where all men are treated as equals not only within their own class, but within the whole of society<sup>6</sup>. This is a strong part of his view of justice in the *Republic* as being synonymous to inequality. How does Popper's view compare to Vlastos'?

Vlastos does not compare Plato's justice to any standard. He views Plato's concept of justice as based on the Principle of Functional Reciprocity, and derives it from a view Plato "left unsaid" (110, Vlastos, SPT) but implies,

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<sup>6</sup> Whether or not these are the qualifications of an open society is not the purpose of this essay, but to understand what justice means in the *Republic*.

and defends it as essential to understanding justice in the *Republic*: “All members of the *polis* have equal rights to those and only those benefits which are required for the optimal performance of their function in the *polis*” (110, Vlastos, SPT). This unsaid principle is implied in Book IV when, regarding justice in the city, Socrates remarks that it is what “has been left over in the city when moderation, courage, and wisdom have been found” (433B), describing it as “the having and doing of one’s own would be accepted as justice” (434A). Vlastos argues that ‘the having and doing of one’s own’ is a contraction for ‘the having and doing of one’s own *work*’. Why Vlastos feels the need to add ‘work’, in the sense of function, is understandable when reviewing Popper’s remark concerning this same passage: “For the problem is whether justice demands that everything which is in some sense ‘our own’, e.g. ‘our own’ class, should therefore be treated, not only as our possession, but as our inalienable possession” (97, Popper). He sees this as a “crude juggle” with the concept of justice, meaning that what is just is to keep what is ours: “this plan of stealing your money is my own” (97, Popper). This view is explained by Popper’s commitment to a principle of justice in the *Republic* similar to Trasymachus’, who views justice as the stronger party keeping their own and subjugating others by limiting them to what they, the rulers, allow them to have. Vlastos’ understanding of justice in the ideal state is different than Popper’s and lies in its distinguishing between inequality and impartiality. Popper argues that the only ‘true’ justice is based on equality, Vlastos’ goal is to show that there is formal equality (albeit admitting the lack of substantive equality) in Plato’s ideal state. The point of dispute lies in what Plato understands by function (or work), and the purpose of the relationship

between rulers and ruled. "One's function [...] is both the citizens' master-duty and, at the same time, his master right" (111, Vlastos, SPT). A function is more than a job, a profession performed by a carpenter or a guardian soldier in return for a share in the benefits of the state. A function is a privilege that gives meaning to the existence of each citizen in the ideal state. To support this premise Vlastos refers to the passage in the *Republic* regarding the type of medical treatment expected in the ideal state. To a man who, due to poor health, is unable to fulfil his function, Socrates prescribes: "that it is not right to give [medical] treatment to a man who could not live in his established round of duties; this would not be profitable either for the man himself or the polis" (407D-E).<sup>7</sup> Vlastos defends an interpretation of function as the "one goal in life with a view to which they [the guardians and producers] do everything they do, both in public and in private" (519C). A man who cannot perform his function, in Plato's view, has nothing to live for. Although this is certainly a ruthless assertion it applies to all, Guardians and Producers alike, and is therefore impartial; function here is understood not as a means of survival, but as a way of life. If it were merely a means of survival, then this passage would not make sense, because a man unable to fulfil a function where the sole purpose is survival would die anyway. This is what distances Popper's view from Vlastos', and the origin of dispute is in what each understands the *polis* to be. Popper sees it as a necessary condition for man's

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<sup>7</sup> Popper interprets this as another sign that the totalitarian state "dominates the life of the citizen from the mating of his parents to the grave," (138, Popper) and shows how different his conception of function in the *Republic* is from Vlastos'. Popper's disregarding of an important detail of the 407D-E passage above, where Plato says that prolonging a sick man's life is not profitable for *both* the man and the city, along with his interpretation of function as a mere profession, lead him to accuse the ideal state of ruthlessness – those who cannot work to improve the state must die.

survival, Vlastos' as the place where men procure a common goal, that of justice and happiness.

The principle of Functional Reciprocity rests on a belief that there can be solidarity between master and slave,<sup>8</sup> which has, as its basis, the assertion that autocratic power does not corrupt.<sup>9</sup> Popper uses as evidence for the *Republic's* fundamental inequalitarian justice the relationship between the guardian and the producer class; Vlastos argues that although it may lack substantive equality, it defends impartiality in terms of functional rights. Each citizen in the ideal state has rights that conduce to the optimal performance of their function, no more, no less. The guardians have all the political rights, but may not earn money or acquire any private property that is not essential to the performance of their function. Their life is restricted to "watching over the city" (420a), as Adeimantus complains to Socrates at the beginning of Book IV. All members of the ideal state, guardians or producers, have the rights that are adequate for the optimal fulfilment of their function, and are not allowed any benefit that is not conducive to this goal. If everyone in the *polis* has the right and the environment to perform his optimal function, then each can benefit not only himself, but also everyone else, toward a common goal. The relationship between classes can only be maintained on the basis of an inherent solidarity between master and slave, or guardians and producers; in the belief that one cannot live without the other, that the slave is as important to the master as the master is to the slave. "All of you are brothers

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<sup>8</sup> Plato uses *doulos* (slave) to refer to the producer class, which according to Vlastos would have shocked contemporary Greek society. This is done with the benign intent to stress the total commitment in the relationship between rulers and producers in the ideal state. (118, Vlastos, SPT)

<sup>9</sup> According to Vlastos, "solidarity between master and slave" is later refuted in *Laws* 757A, and "autocratic power does no corrupt" is refuted in *Laws* 713C.

in the *polis*" (415A), they all depend on each other through the complete subjection of one class to another. Although, as Vlastos points out, Plato refuted this belief later in *Laws*, it is central to understanding justice in the *Republic*. While Popper describes justice in the *polis* as an *excuse* for one, stronger, group of people to rule over another, Vlastos' views the *polis* as a place where one group rules another for a common purpose for the benefit of both. The difference between Popper's and Vlastos' view may appear minimal, but is essential to understand Plato's conception of justice, and ultimately the source of the philosopher's authority. To dispel any doubts it is necessary to understand Plato's reasoning behind strict class division and why he believed the producers' subjugation to the philosopher improved the life of both ruler and ruled. The key is in the still that unanswered question, why justice pays.

At the early stages of the *Republic* Socrates is challenged by Glaucon, "But yet I've yet to hear anyone defend justice in the way I want, proving that it is better than injustice. I want to hear it praised *by itself*..."(358d). Following this challenge Socrates reviews the common (or current) conception of justice, which had been voiced earlier by Trasymachus: "The best is to do injustice without paying the penalty; the worst is to suffer it without being able to take revenge" (359A). Socrates must prove that justice is not a question of the rule of the stronger. Recalling how Socrates did not question established rule – in an earlier reply to Trasymachus who had defended justice as "the advantage of the established rule" (338e) – but what 'advantage' entails, it is clear that the basic conception of Justice in the *Republic* must rely on a common goal for all through a political hierarchy: accepting the existence of established rule, yet defending a

definition of justice where all gain from it. For all to gain, then justice must be “good in and of itself, not merely for its consequences [for that would lead rulers seek advantage from it]; and it is so great a good that no good securable by injustice could be greater [once again, to prevent rulers from opting for injustice<sup>10</sup>]” (112, Vlastos, PS). ‘Good’ is an ellipsis for ‘good for oneself’, not in the sense of morally good, but because it makes a man just.

In the paper “Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*” Vlastos identifies two different *aspects* of justice in the *Republic*, ‘social’ and ‘psychological’ justice. Vlastos states the definition of ‘psychological’ justice as: “One is a *just* man [...] if each of these three parts [reason, spirit and appetite] functions optimally, and there results that state of inner peace, amity, and concord, which I have called ‘psychic harmony’” (115, Vlastos, PS). As for ‘social’ justice he defends that “it stands for the active disposition to behave justly toward one’s fellows”, i.e. it is not sufficient to be a just man (psychic harmony) or perform random just acts. Social justice in the *Republic*, Vlastos defends, is to keep in line with a social conduct that will “contribute maximally to the happiness and excellence of” the *polis* (119, Vlastos, PS). To avoid confusion, it is convenient to remember that in the *Republic* there are *not* two distinct justices, one in the state and another of the people of the state. Justice in the state is a result of the people who make up the *polis* and both, together, are necessary to make a state just. Psychic harmony is one’s ‘inner’ justice and the social disposition is one’s ‘outer’ justice – together they form one justice in the ideal state. Justice is good in and of itself because it

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<sup>10</sup> Plato identifies the fate of the state with that of the ruling class because, being in control, it has the power to act justly or unjustly, not, as Popper defends, because Plato had no interest in the lower class. If anything his preoccupation in restraining the ruling class only shows how important the lower, powerless class is to the construction of the ideal state.

maintains harmony in the soul of men and consequently in the state they have formed. The importance of maintaining harmony, the source of justice and what justifies the philosopher's authority, is based on how Plato understands the Forms.

The Forms are 'really real' and are attainable (or reached) by knowledge (*logos*), while sensible instances are perceived by the senses, they are opinion (*doxa*). This distinction is summed up by Vlastos from a passage in Book X of the *Republic* (597 ff.): "The Form of a bed is the 'real' bed; the physical bed, the one made by the carpenter, is not 'perfectly real', [it] is 'a shadowy sort of thing by comparison with reality'" (43, Vlastos, PS). There are two dimensions in what Plato understands by 'real': the cognitive and the mystical.

By cognitive sense, Plato understands the Forms as being only Form (Vlastos, F-only), and by sensible instances as having (or being composed of) both Form and something not Form (F and not-F). In this sense, 'real' (F-only) is understood as cognitively reliable. A bed made by a carpenter is a copy of the Form of bed and so has both the Form of the bed and something that is not Form (F and not-F); "for they are ambiguous, and one cannot understand them as fixedly being or fixedly not being or as both or as neither" (479c). When a painter uses the carpenter's bed as a model he is copying a copy, his painting of a bed is even less cognitively reliable than the carpenter's bed (more not-F) to someone attempting to discern what the essence of bed is ("What are those properties which make up the essence of bed?" (62, Vlastos, SP)). Returning to the passage in 479C cited above, 'being' ('is'), as Plato



understands it, does not imply 'existing'. According to Vlastos, Plato does not make this distinction explicit, which has led some to confuse Plato's 'is' or 'is real' with 'it exists'. (46, Vlastos, PS) He defends Plato is not arguing that the bed made by the carpenter is not real in the sense that it does not exist, only that it is not cognitively dependable – you can see a physical bed, its Form along with other properties not-Form, but you cannot discern which is which. Plato's main concern is not the inability to distinguish the Form from other properties, but when someone takes these other properties for the Form: "Isn't this dreaming: [...] to think that a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like?" This is how the senses deceive; they lead us to take not-F for F. And this is why, in the cognitive sense, Socrates speaks of sensibles as being in darkness, clouded by other properties that make it difficult to discern Form, and looking at the Forms by themselves like seeing in the light. This is even more relevant in the matter of value-predicates, Justice, Beauty and Good where there is no physical property to allow a person to *fix* their gaze: "Each of them is itself one, but because they manifest themselves everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears to be many" (476A). Only the Forms can be trusted in the pursuit of knowledge, only they are cognitively dependable.

Knowing the Forms can be an aesthetic experience, because they sate the philosopher's yearning for beauty, as well as an intellectual experience because "it marks a climatic point in the pursuit of knowledge" (52, Vlastos, PS). When "the philosopher is pictured as gazing daily at the Forms, which are 'orderly and ever constant, neither wronging, nor being wronged by, one another, but abide in harmony and the rule of reason'" it also becomes a

moralizing experience. Men who gaze at what they love eventually imitate it, and become like them. But the Forms are also presented as a divine experience, “the philosopher consorting with the divine and harmonious, will himself become as harmonious and divine as any man may (500C-D)” (52, Vlastos, PS).

This is how the Forms are understood in a mystical sense. Vlastos calls this strand of Plato's thought the “the construction of a metaphysical system” (54, Vlastos, PS). The cognitive sense of the Forms enables cognitive dependability and abstract thought, but Vlastos identifies the mystical sense because the philosopher who knows, sees and covets the Forms is transformed by them so much that he comes to regard them as ‘more real’ than what the senses tell him is real. The philosopher is said to be not only a Form-knower, but also a Form-lover (475C). He remains committed to one thing, which he loves; his gaze is fixed in the divine and harmonious and he will himself become divine and harmonious. The sense of the real, here, is different than in the section above. The Forms are more real than sensible instances because they are untainted, they are eternal and perfect while the ‘earthly’ world is limited by time and imperfect; they are not “only guideposts to their best instances in common experience, but are themselves the focal points of a most uncommon experience which he discovered for himself and found incomparably more satisfying than any other” (53, Vlastos, PS). While the Forms, in the cognitive sense, serve the purpose of discerning what is real (in the logic already discussed), the Forms in this sense transform the philosopher, make him a different, better person – ‘real’ gains another dimension. When compared to a man who devotes his life to money and

another who devotes it to honour, the philosopher is certain to have found a superior devotion, since of the three men he is the only one who has access to all pleasures, money, honour and reason, and he has chosen reason: “then, of the three pleasures, the most pleasant is that of the part of the soul with which we learn, and the one in whom that part rules has the most pleasant life” (584A). When Socrates emphasizes that the philosopher ‘has the most pleasant life’ he is not merely speaking of a man who can discern F from not-F, he is *also* speaking of a way of life. The Forms are more real, in what Vlastos calls the mystical sense, because they allow the philosopher to *live* in a reality that transcends that of sensible instances – a divine and harmonious way of life. The Forms become the guideposts for a life of justice and happiness, and it is through them that he guides the state; they constitute a goal, the essence of that by which they, both the producers and philosophers, are to direct their own lives. The producers, without access to this ‘superior way of life’, will be guided by the philosophers through their access to the Forms toward the right, the only way of to live, and both will benefit from it. The philosopher, because he is clothed and fed by the producers, the producers, because they are led toward excellence and happiness: “Therefore, to insure that someone like that [in whom the best part is naturally weak] is ruled by something similar to what rules the best person, we say that he ought to be the slave of that best person who has a divine ruler within himself” (590D); “The people we mean are fitted by nature both to engage in philosophy and to rule in a city, while the rest are naturally fitted to leave philosophy alone and follow their leader” (474B). The key word from this passage is nature. How Plato understands nature is key to why the

philosophers should rule in the state. It is also one of Popper's main points to attack what he calls Plato's (exclusive<sup>11</sup>) sociology. Plato is labelled a 'spiritual naturalist', which is a combination of ethical positivism and biological naturalism. I do not wish to put too much emphasis on these terms, but to do so only enough to understand Popper's argument. A spiritual naturalist believes ethical positivism is correct in believing "all norms as conventions [...], but overlooks that they are an expression of the psychological or spiritual nature of man and of the nature of human society" (72, Popper). Where biological naturalism is concerned, spiritual naturalism states that it is "right in assuming that there are certain natural aims or ends, from which we can derive natural norms; but [...] overlooks the fact that our natural aims" (72, Popper) may be higher than basic subsistence; they can be, for example, spiritual aims. Poppers claims Plato used spiritual naturalism to justify the natural prerogatives of the noble or 'natural leaders'. How Popper understands nature is misled by how he understands the Forms. According to Popper, nature in Plato means nearly the same thing as Form, except that while Form is the primogenitor but separate from it, nature is the original quality of a thing. This is what allows him to say that "what is the nature of human society, of the state?" is the same as "what is the origin of society and state?" And his reply is, the "imperfection of the human individual." Popper disregards the pursuit of excellence and happiness, and so the harmony in the soul (which leads to harmony in the state) necessary for its realization. Man's nature must follow the pattern of the Forms (*not* return to them), this is how

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<sup>11</sup> As Vlastos argues in "The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's Republic" (Vlastos, 1995), there is both a normative *and* a meta-normative theory of justice in the *Republic*.

he achieves psychic harmony and makes the state just. The nature of human society, of the state, is not a question of origin but that it is through them (their example) that man achieves natural order, perfection and the path towards justice and happiness. Neither the philosopher nor the producer depend on the state to reach perfection, they depend on the divine and harmonious Forms, which are imprinted in the soul of the men who make the state just if they become like them, if they follow their order. Only the philosopher has access to the Forms, only he can establish justice and rule in the perfect state. The philosopher's knowledge transcends those whom he leads who are, by nature, incapable of realizing it – this is the source of his authority.

## **Tolstoy and Authority**

Alyosha, the pot, is nineteen when his father, a peasant, puts him to work for a wealthy merchant in town. Alyosha's scrawny look does not impress the merchant, but what he doesn't have in physical force, Alyosha makes up by the will to perform his duty. His reward for being a good worker is to be treated and seen like a tool, like a good wrench that is not praised for its work but only used more often. Alyosha is an instrument in the hands of his father, who keeps his wages, and the merchant's family, who give him no rest. Only the cook, a young woman of the same age, sees in Alyosha a human being, or so he thinks, and they decide to marry. A cook is no good pregnant, decides the merchant, and Alyosha is forced by his father to give up his plan. By the end, Alyosha falls off a roof while working and dies.

Written in 1905 by Leo Tolstoy, five years before his death, "Alyosha the pot" is a short story, which in a few pages touches on many of the key issues that engaged both his fiction and non-fiction work. Key to misunderstanding the story is to see in Alyosha a victim. This story is *not* a realistic depiction of the travails and injustices suffered by the lower classes. Alyosha suffers, he does not lead a leisurely life, and it is through this suffering that he embodies what Tolstoy understands as the 'right way to live'.

Alyosha was carrying a pot of milk to the deacon's wife when he fell over, broke it and thereon was nicknamed 'the pot'. Throughout the story, Alyosha is seen and treated as an object, a tool. Throughout the story Alyosha's livelihood consists of obeying orders. In *A Confession* Tolstoy writes (28), "On these occasions, when life came to a standstill, the same questions always arose: 'Why? What comes next?'" It is a recurring question that fills his fiction and non-fiction, the search for a rational meaning to life, and this answer had to satisfy not only life, but also death. Why and how should he live, that would not become meaningless with death? Tolstoy found the answer in the Sermon of the Mount, in the brotherly union of all men, which he understands as a man living for others, not for himself. In the Gospel he found an answer that is social and moral; an organization of society based on moral standards. It is in the relationship between men that Tolstoy finds the answer to his "Why?" Alyosha lives for others throughout the story, dedicating his life to one purpose: work. He was nicknamed 'the pot' by other people who use him as an instrument, an object; who see him for his services and not as a human being.

Alyosha does not, however, serve other people to please; he serves people because it is who, what he is; this is how he is free. Tolstoy's diary entry clarifies this point, "Only a person who considers himself free can submit to other people. A person who does what he wants considers himself free; but a person who does what he wants is a slave of everything" November 9, 1906 (402, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). Being treated as a servant, ordered around by everyone around him, is Alyosha's source of life. Tolstoy speaks often of vanity as one of the main sources of harm men do to themselves and others. Alyosha, in this sense, is the opposite of vanity; he obeys every order given to him, never thinking of himself: this is

what makes him, in Tolstoy's view, someone living by the example of Christ. His relationship to people is completely selfless. When his boots are worn out and the merchant buys him new ones, deducting the cost from his wages, Alyosha is afraid his father will be angry for receiving less money. The word in the text is 'afraid', but there is no fear, it is only anger at himself for not bearing the pain of wearing the worn out boots. He is responding to how his father is, loving him for whom he is, forgiving him his anger and doing all he can to subside it. When one tries to please someone else it is done out of self-love, of having others think good of oneself. Alyosha does not work hard to please either his father or the merchant's family – never in the story does Alyosha speak of doing a job well, only of getting a job done to serve his fellow man. Alyosha reflects an entry Tolstoy made in his diary one year after writing this story: "How difficult it is to distinguish whether you serve people for their good (to satisfy an inner striving to love), or for the gratitude and praise you will get from them." December 29, 1906 (404, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). Regardless of the injustices caused to Alyosha, he learns to love those around him. Part of the paradox in his professed social organization *versus* his Christian Anarchism is the opposition between doing good and striving for inner love. Two years later, Tolstoy makes a contradictory diary entry, "Yes, this doing good to others, is a dreadful evil. [...] All the evil of government, all the evil of the revolutionaries, all the evil of education, all economic evil stems from it." May 21, 1908 (415, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). 'Doing good' from a position of authority was against his convictions.

The attempt to change people was, in Tolstoy's view wrong, "Everybody is called on to reform and improve himself only, and everybody should and can do so." September 7, 1907 (410, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). This is how and why Alyosha



accepts and does not try to change the people around him. Alyosha, seen under Tolstoyan doctrine, is a boy who has found God within, accepting to live in a corrupt society because his duty is to love, not to change. Tolstoy was firmly committed against hierarchies, men working so other men could enjoy leisure time, but he was also committed to the principle of non-resistance as professed by Jesus Christ, 'resist not him that is evil' (Matthew, 5:39, *The Bible*), which he interprets as "What Christ meant to say, 'Whatever men may do to you, bear, suffer, submit; but never resist evil'" (12, *What I Believe*). This is the basis of Tolstoy advocating "never offer violence to anyone" (14, *What I Believe*), of Alyosha bearing his schoolmates' teasing and his father's scolding in silence. The father who puts his son to work, the merchant and his family are committing injustices to Alyosha, but in the end he is the only character who has lived the right way because he has learned to bear it and still love those who are committing these injustices to him. They live wrongly, are blinded to the truth of equality among men; Alyosha is not the victim of their mistake, he is fortunate to be capable of suffering for other people's sins.

What distinguishes Alyosha from most of Tolstoy's characters is his certainty, his unquestioned dedication to his purpose. Many of Tolstoy's characters are in pursuit of a 'right' way to live, through moral precepts and the subsequent failure to live up to those standards. This attempt is present early in Tolstoy's life, as is evidenced by *Youth, Childhood, Infancy*. Nikolenka, the protagonist and narrator, believes in the innate 'moral instinct' of the possibility of human perfection. This is made clear in the transformations occurring through the different stages of Nikolenka's life. The transformation from childhood to youth is Nikolenka's first acknowledgement of death which brought with it the

acknowledgement of a purpose to life: "Can Providence really have united me with those two beings [his mother and her maid had recently died] only in order that I should ever mourn their loss?" (103, CBY). It was the death of his mother that ended Nikolenka's childhood by ending his period of innocence and forcing him to face life; someone has to die so that Nikolenka can value and give meaning to his life. The subsequent period of time, boyhood, is the attempt to understand what the purpose of life is. He arrives at an answer by the end of this period: the "firm belief that the purpose of man's life is continually to perfect himself" (176, CBY). If Childhood is the discovery of a purpose to life, then Boyhood is the discovery of what that purpose is. The purpose of his perfection, as stated by Nikolenka at the final stage of Boyhood, is based on the belief that the abolition of all vices will lead to the reformation of mankind; the purpose of self-perfection is in response to the world around him. As will become common in Tolstoy's works, all change is 'inner' (natural, instinctual), but results from 'outer' influences. The subsequent period of youth is marked by a failure to live up to the standards he has imposed on himself. This search for a 'big truth', the solution to all of mankind's problems, is beyond him. The young boy who had lived securely surrounded by family and tutors, who had been accepted at school with top grades, was suddenly led astray by the friends he meets when he arrives at school. These friends, their habits formed by a society where he wants to belong, consume Nikolenka until he becomes but a shadow of himself (as Tolstoy understands this concept of a natural self). His wish to be '*comme il faut*' (a recurrent expression in Tolstoy's fictional work) leads him to forget the rules he had imposed on himself, the purpose of life: his pursuit for moral perfection. It was society that ruined his natural self, not his natural self that did not evolve

in society – his ‘inner’ purpose was effaced by his ‘outer’ need, and this failure led him to conclude not that the ‘inner’ was wrong, but that it is society that is corrupt. The transformation from Youth to a fourth stage of his life (which Tolstoy planned to write but never did) is marked not by his assessment of what went wrong in his society life and how to correct it within society, but by returning to the rules of life, his inner self: “I suddenly leaped to my feet, ran upstairs, got out the *Journal* on which was inscribed RULES OF LIFE, opened it, and experienced my first moment of repentance and moral resolution [...] Pulling myself together, I decided to write down a fresh set of rules, in the assured conviction that never again would I do anything wrong, nor spend a single idle minute, nor ever go back on my resolutions” (319, CBY). That Tolstoy later creates Olenin in the *The Cossacks*, an equally autobiographical character, leaving Moscow for the Caucasus to get away from the debts incurred by a gambling habit, shows that this new set of rules did not have their intended effect.

When Olenin arrives in the Caucasus, he is impressed with the simple lifestyle of the Cossack village where he is stationed as a military officer. Seeing in it the opposite of the life he had left behind, he embraces it and decides this is the life he wants to lead. Contrary to what Olenin wants to believe, his vices did not stay in the city, they made the journey with him, within him. He combats them by searching for a new way of life; this new source of happiness is arrived at by reason: “The need for happiness has been placed in every human being; therefore it is lawful” (93, *The Cossacks and Other Stories*)<sup>12</sup>. Olenin is out hunting with Uncle Yeroshka when he has these thoughts; the origin of this

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<sup>12</sup> Part of the argument in this section has been taken from p. 62, Philip Rahv, “The Green Twig and the Black Trunk”. *Leo Tolstoy*, ed. Harold Bloom. His translation of this passage is different, but the essence is the similar.)

rationalization comes from the belief that, "It doesn't matter what I am: an animal like all the others on top of whom the grass will grow, and that is all..." (93, *The Cossacks and Other Stories*). Olenin wants the change of scenery to operate a change of self. His old way of life, his former vices and his family become obstacles, which must be obliterated if Olenin is going to live a simple life close to nature through work and independence from society '*comme il faut*'. Like Nikolenka whose moral corruption resulting from joining school and absorbing the vices from his schoolmates leads him to get away from school and back home to the rules of life, Olenin seeks to be saved by living according to nature, which was how he understood the Cossack lifestyle. The inner change is always expected to derive from an outer source. Nikolenka had to leave school to be saved; Olenin needs to stay in the Caucasus to be regenerated. Although there is a recurrent attempt to unite them, 'inner' and 'outer' are always in conflict in many of Tolstoy's characters. The rules of life are his solution, they derive from reason, they do not evolve out of how he sees the world, but by how he wants the world to be. Thus the inner self conditions the interpretation of the outside environment.

This explains his shielding off from the world later in life; his previous wish to 'do good', is exchanged by his advocating with Christ the inner strength to accept good and bad, to suffer, to love all men regardless of their sins regardless of who they are or of how society functions. The outside world is now not seen as something that needs to change, it is merely acknowledged as corrupt. The paradox lies in his need to advocate this new message: what he saw as his vocation to spread what he understood from the example of Christ. He calls it anarchism, Christian anarchism, because he preached that all men have

truth 'naturally' within; all convention and social organization are thus contrary to people living according to this inner truth. This is the fallacy of his preaching: 'no one should tell you how to live because it is already inside you, but someone must teach you how to find it within you'. Speaking of anarchism and against authority in his diary Tolstoy writes, "The people sense this, and no longer put up with power, but want freedom, complete freedom. One must first throw a certain amount off a heavily laden wagon in order to be able to overturn it. The time has come not to throw things off gradually any more, but to overturn the wagon" July 2, 1904 (378, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). The rules of life, the pursuit of higher, big truths were substituted by one big truth: to love both the wrongs and the rights. There are no rules of life, there is only one, which he called truth: to live with Christ within, to love, bear and suffer. Eventually, if all understand the message of Christ, the world will change. Rules of social organization are exchanged for moral or spiritual or psychological rules. It is a change of the world from within, but a change nonetheless.

In the end of *The Cossacks*, as Olenin prepares to return to the city, his plan of becoming a Cossack now irreparably lost, Uncle Yeroshka tells him, "You're sort of *unloved*", and then cites two verses from a song, "It isn't easy, brother mine,/Living in a foreign clime" (180, *The Cossacks and Other Stories*). Living in the city, Olenin was a victim of his vices, living in the Caucasus he was a victim of the sins he was unable to leave behind: lust for Maryanka, the Cossack girl, and his inability to live without his past, what Tolstoy calls his vanity. There is a recurrent unease in many of Tolstoy's fictional characters, always questioning how they should live through the search for a purpose and ultimately failing to live up to it. Reason, which Olenin uses to 'return' to nature,

is the cause of his having to leave it behind and return once again to society. Paradoxically, his attempt at living through nature, because it is done through reason (the foreign clime), ultimately pulls him away from nature. When Olenin offers Lukashka a horse under the reasoning that he has two and Lukashka none, he does it to feel better about himself for having done a good deed. Later, when Lukashka gets in the way of Olenin's pursuit of Maryanka, he has no problem in attempting to sabotage their planned marriage; Olenin wants to marry Maryanka and become a Cossack, so he reasons that what he is doing is right. Reason, as Olenin learns, can justify everything – both good and bad –, but it provides no stability because reason never stops. This stability is pursued in nature, a 'natural life', but as Olenin learns, nature cannot control, guide or mitigate reason.

"Alyosha, the pot" written many years later, is an 'older character', and this is why he is portrayed as a young, uncorrupted boy, whose reason is transmitted with a clear, defined view of life through work. It is a natural tendency, if one believes in the corrupting effect of developed society to see children as 'naturally' uncorrupted: "The true life is lived above all by children, who enter life and are not yet aware of time. They never want anything to be changed" April 30, 1907 (408, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). This is in tune with Tolstoy's views on 'modern' education. To educate a child, according to Tolstoy, is to impose on them a conventional way of looking at life and thereby harming their natural instincts, it is the attempt to transform them into artificial people. He saw education from the point of view of the peasant children; therefore, he urged education to be a means of improving their natural instincts, and *not* to impose on them views and information for which they have no use: "Alyosha went to the

village school, but was not good at lessons; besides, there was so little time to learn." Alyosha left school early, which helps explain why his natural self has not been corrupted or misguided, why he values work (love, suffer) above all other purposes of life. He does not seek change and is immune to exterior motives because he has learned to suffer, which neither Olenin nor Nikolenka were able to do; they sought happiness, Alyosha knows that happiness is merely the ability to love. Alyosha needs no rules, they are defined in him, through him; he is committed to one single goal.

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In *A Confession*, Tolstoy writes (32): "These two drops of honey, which more than all else had diverted my eyes from the cruel truth, my love for my family and for my writing, which I called art – I no longer found sweet". *A Confession* is written in the search for a meaning of to the "senselessness of life" (34), or expressed another way, "is there any meaning in my life that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me?" Family life and writing had occupied him for many years, but in the end proved unsatisfactory, and were blamed as distracting him from the search for truth. Tolstoy seeks a purpose, and Alyosha succinctly puts the difficulty between a married life and a purposeful life when he realizes that Ustinia is occupying his daily thoughts: "This was such a new, strange thing to him that it frightened Alyosha. He feared that it might interfere with his work." It is the cook Ustinia who makes Alyosha realize "for the first time in his life that he – not his services, but he himself – was necessary to another human being." When Ustinia brings up the subject of marriage, Alyosha says he will marry her. The scene is very short and

unsentimental – Alyosha does not speak of love or passion, he speaks of marriage in the same way as he speaks of work, something that is to be done. It is an opportunity for Alyosha to feel like a human being, “not for his services,” but for himself, but which will also distract him and possibly endanger his work; it is as if feeling like a human being is engaging in a way of life that is not his, distracting him from his purpose. Alyosha, here, is confused and mistaken – what he takes for feeling like a human being is actually, in Tolstoy's view, following the rules of society. Although Alyosha had caught himself thinking about Ustinia, the conversation that leads to the proposal is started by her: “On one occasion she asked him if his parents intended marrying him soon.” She obviously has feelings for him as he does for her, but her conversation is expressed conventionally: once you reach a certain age and have a job, you should think about marrying because that is ‘*comme il faut*’. It is normal for boys to marry city girls, which leads Alyosha, distracted by Ustinia to follow her advice and ask her if she'll marry her. Ustinia preys on Alyosha's feelings for her, his weakness that will divert him from his purpose. Alyosha does not marry Ustinia, because his father does not allow it. He accepts his father's decision with joy, but this is not pleasure, it is the joy of following his purpose, of suffering and living for others (and not for himself, which is how the marriage is understood here). When the merchant's wife asks Alyosha about his decision, “ ‘Are you going to obey your father and forget all this nonsense about marrying?’ ‘Yes, of course. I've forgot it,’ Alyosha said quickly, then smiled and immediately began weeping.” It is when Alyosha acknowledges his suffering that the reader senses his humanity. Paradoxically, it is this humanity, Alyosha's individuality, which Tolstoy interprets as vanity. The titles of chapter five and six of *Gospel in Brief* (which



will be discussed later in this essay), are (5) Service of the Will of the Father of Life is life-giving, (6) And therefore it is not necessary to life that each man should satisfy his own will (17, Intro. *Gospel in Brief*). Alyosha is the 'pot' because he is a tool of the Will of the Father. Marriage, and its obligations, would be contrary to his purpose; if Alyosha marries he ceases to be the 'pot' to become the husband (and eventually the father).

In *A Confession*, Tolstoy writes that marriage saved him (26) from a life of ambition for money, fame and gambling. Like Olenin, who escaped to the Caucasus to get away from his debts and gambling habit, Tolstoy also exchanged one life for another when he decided to settle down and build a family. Like Olenin, Tolstoy too realized that his spirit is not cleansed by a change of scenery. What had previously saved him is now as seen as hindrance to his salvation. No story best expresses this feeling in its extreme than *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the portrayal of a man who in his struggle to meet the demands of married life leads a life without meaning. In his deathbed, after the accident that ultimately killed him, Alyosha says to Ustinia, "What a lucky thing they didn't let us marry! Where should we have been now? It's much better as it is." Why we? This is not a simple passage of a man regretting leaving a widow alone to take care of herself. This "we" refers to both her being left a widow if they had been married, and Alyosha regretting death if he had left something behind. Death is only difficult if you become attached to life. In *A Confession* having a family is seen as partly responsible for misleading his life. Tolstoy's path is towards detachment, the effort to see life clearly with no obstacles in the way. This is clearly seen in Tolstoy's fascination with Eastern religions, which have detachment of spirit from self (or ego) as core to their view of the world. In *A Confession* Tolstoy cites

Buddha<sup>13</sup>, “To live in the consciousness of the inevitability of suffering, of becoming enfeebled, of old age and of death, is impossible—we must free ourselves from life, from all possible life” (44, *A Confession*). Ultimately, such a radical detachment from life leads a man inward, with no outside standards and nothing to guide him. In *Reminiscences*, Gorky writes, thinking of Tolstoy, “Let them leave a man in peace, to his habitual, tormenting, and sometimes cozy loneliness facing the bottomless pit of the problem of ‘the essential’” (Gorky, “A Letter”, *Reminiscences*). The essential is death; to die is to leave everything behind. Alyosha, who only served a selfless purpose, left no attachments and the reward is a death he can accept and bear.

“Property is the root of all evil, and the division of safeguarding of property occupies the whole world” (161, *What Then Must We Do?*), Tolstoy wrote concerning both land and money. Alyosha never receives his wages; his father, from whom he receives no thanks or praise, only rebuke for wearing out his boots, collects the money for his work. Alyosha’s father is not an affable character; he appears in the story first to put Alyosha to work, then to collect money and finally to tell him he cannot get married. And Alyosha, although already nineteen, never complains about his father, on the contrary he seeks to serve him. Alyosha’s father is not an evil character; he contrasts with his son in that he does not know how or why to live. In the short story “How Much Land Does a Man Need”, the protagonist, Pakhom, a wealthy merchant, negotiates a

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<sup>13</sup> This should not be taken as Tolstoy’s total commitment to Buddhism. Buddhism was, in many ways, the complete opposite of his beliefs: “Buddhism is only wrong in not recognizing the meaning and purpose of *this* life which leads to self-renunciation. We don’t see it but it is there, and so this life is just as real as any other.” November 17, 1906 (402, *Tolstoy’s Diaries*) To accept the Buddhist interpretation would entail the negation of a purpose to this life, which is core to Tolstoy’s doctrine.

deal with a religious group called the Bashkirs<sup>14</sup> to buy as much land as he can walk from sunrise to sunset, with the condition that he return before the sun sets on penalty of losing both the land and the money he has paid up front. He has become, throughout the story, a wealthy landowner through astute (and not always honest) business skills, and this last deal promises to make him a rich man. When Pakhom returns from his day of walking around the land, the sun sets as he reaches his starting point, but he has walked so much that he dies of exhaustion. I bring up this story due to the Bashkirs' reaction at the end of the story. Although they would stand to lose a lot of land had Pakhom reached his destination alive, they are cheering for him as he returns to the starting point. It is they, who care little for material possessions, who live the right way. They value the land because it provides a home and guarantees their survival; Pakhom values it because it will turn him into a rich landowner. Pakhom is misguided by his greed and vanity. Alyosha, who owns nothing apart from basic goods, a good jacket and a pair of boots, is in tune with Tolstoy's affirmation that "my real property will still be only my own body – that which always submits to me and is bound up with my consciousness" (162, *What Then Must We Do?*). Tolstoy saw life as having been given to us for a purpose and what we do not take with us to the grave is conventional and superficial, so we must not allow it to misguide us through life. This is in tune with his detachment from all life that is not from within, with a life comprehended only through death.

The acceptance of living a life where he does not feel like a 'human being' but like a man who is seen for his services is how Alyosha could be seen, to a

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<sup>14</sup> Along with the Doukhobors, for whom Tolstoy wrote *Resurrection* to help pay for their resettlement in Canada following the persecution by the Orthodox Church in Russia, the Bashkirs are one of the few religious groups in Russia for whom Tolstoy expressed admiration.

reader not familiar with Tolstoy's work, as a victim of the circumstances of his life. To see him this way, though, is to deny that, by the end, Alyosha dies in peace – which Tolstoy regards as a fundamental characteristic of a good life. This view of death as a 'judge of life' is present throughout all of Tolstoy's fictional and non-fictional work: In his first novel *Childhood*, where Natalia Savishna, the old maid, "accomplished the best and greatest thing in life – she died without regret or fear" (103, *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*), in *War and Peace* where Platon Karataev shortly before dying is seen by Pierre – "His face, [...] also shone an expression of quiet solemnity" (1063, *War and Peace*) - and in his last story where Hadji Murat, mortally wounded, is described thus: "It all seemed so insignificant compared to what was now beginning and had already begun for him" (463, "Hadji Murat", *The Cossacks and Other Stories*). As a point of contrast, Anna Karenina's last thought before throwing herself under the train is: "There, in the very middle [of the train tracks], and I shall punish him and escape from them all and from myself" (801, *Anna Karenin*). The possibility of dying well, with no regrets is dependent on living the 'right way', with oneself and with others. To make sense of life through death was how Nikolenka, in *Childhood*, first realized there was a purpose of to his existence, and this followed Tolstoy throughout his life as is evident in a diary entry he makes in 1905, five years before his death: "Living is dying. To live well means to die well. Try to die well" August 27 (389, *Tolstoy's Diaries*).

After learning of Tolstoy's fateful flight from Yasnaya Polyana only to end in the Atapovo train station, Gorky sat down to write a letter, which he included in his *Reminiscences*. There he remembers a phrase Tolstoy once said to him, ""If a man has learnt to think, no matter what he may think about, he is always

thinking of his own death. All philosophers were like that. And what truths can there be, if there is death?" (Gorky, *Reminiscences*). In *A Confession*, Tolstoy writes, "Contrary to us, who the more intelligent we are the less we understand the meaning of life and see some kind of malicious joke in the fact that we suffer and die, these people [peasants] live, suffer and approach death peacefully and, more often than not, joyfully" (59, *A Confession*). He found his answer in the peasants, embodied by Alyosha, who lives a simple, working life with few attachments. Alyosha is capable of accepting death because he lived 'the right way', through the 'will of the Father.'

In his non-fiction book *What Then Must We Do?*, Tolstoy writes, "The scientists and artists could only say that their activity was useful to the people if they made it their aim to serve the labourers as they now make it their aim to serve the government of capitalists" (132). In this book he defends that the aim of all science, art and religion should be to guarantee the welfare of all the people. Tolstoy provides in it an account of how he came to this conclusion after witnessing the squalid conditions under which poor people lived in the city. Set on helping them, he began by giving money to the poor thinking that this would help them, and criticizes himself in retrospect because his actions were led by the thought that, "The fact of the matter is that I am very good, kind man, and wish to benefit my neighbours" (18). He recognizes that his first instinct to help the poor was a result of his vanity – he gave money away seeking to feel good about himself, feeling it as a good way to atone for the fact that he lives in luxury while others have nothing. Alyosha, in this sense, is counter to this. He does not work to feel good about himself; he does it because he *knows* it is the right thing and is joyful about it. I have italicized the word 'know' because this is the

difficulty (and in a way the fallacy) of this character. This inner certainty is something Tolstoy was never able to realize in himself, not only because of exterior motives (having a family proved to be an obstacle in his quest to rid himself of all property), but also motives related to Tolstoy, the man whom two years before his death writes in his diary, "Woke up early. Eight beggars [Beggars asking for alms came often to Yasnaya Polyana]. I felt they were human beings, but couldn't deal with them humanely" September 30, 1909 (444, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). In his defence, he was honest about his difficulty in keeping with what he professed, although, had he been completely honest, he would have assessed this difficulty in devising his social program. Alyosha works and suffers with joy, which Tolstoy was certain all men, given a chance to see things 'how they really are,' would soon realize – Tolstoy never did. At the base of his defence for a new social order is his belief in man's natural state, "I see that what is happening is as though in an ant-hill the society of ants were to lose its sense of a common law, and some ants began to carry the produce of toil from the bottom of the heap to the top, ever narrowing the base and enlarging the top and so compelling the other ants to shift from the base to the top" (53-54, *What Then Must We Do?*). In the original, natural state of things, everyone was equal and all worked, all of which was ruined by progress led by some bad elements. Tolstoy believed that all men should work, artists, clergy and aristocrats alike, and live with basic sustenance, for this is the only way to end inequality among men<sup>15</sup>: to create a true universal brotherhood. While he accused the Church of seeing society solely through the eyes of the upper classes, Tolstoy saw all of society through the eyes

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<sup>15</sup> The unfair "division of labour" (113, *What Then Must We Do?*) is one of Tolstoy's chief criticisms of 'modern' society

of the peasants. Economically it makes sense, the only way for everyone to be equal, due to the lack of available resources, is for everyone to live with little. Socially, it rests on the belief that all of us have the means and the will to see the truth of equality among men. This is when Tolstoy's view of society becomes utopian. In his search for substantive equality he disregards impartiality. He recognizes that some educated men have the power to change the present condition and he asks these men to live like peasants, while disregarding that not all men are willing to, or capable of, working for a collective goal – i.e. not all men have 'truth within'. If all men work, then there is no need for some to work while others enjoy the fruits of their work. He even shows how painless this would be by citing his own example: "It turned out that if I - a very prolific writer who for forty years have done nothing but write, and have written some 5,000 pages, - if I had worked all those forty years at a peasant's usual work, then, not reckoning winter evenings and workless days, if I had read and studied for five hours every day and had written only on holidays two pages a day (and I have sometimes written as much as sixteen pages a day) I should have produced those 5,000 pages in fourteen years."<sup>16</sup> (150-151, *What Then Must We Do?*). He advocates a new social organization regarding all men as equal, based on his view of the 'natural' state of man as having an inner truth, always face to face with death, finding God within. If only men recognize this, they will not allow others to suffer so they may enjoy more leisurely time – and thus all men will live for the same purpose. Behind this view is a purpose Tolstoy carried with him since childhood. In his later years, referring to a game he used to play with his brothers, Tolstoy

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<sup>16</sup> Although it makes no difference to Tolstoy's argument, as Aylmer Maude points out, the math is not correct: "To get the sum right Tolstoy should, I think, have allowed himself 4 pages a day instead of 2. Taking 90 Sundays and Saints' days in the peasants' year, we get 90 days x 4 pages x 14 years = 5,040, or about what Tolstoy says he had actually written. – A.M."

wrote: "The ideal of ant-brothers lovingly clinging to one another, though not under two armchairs curtained by shawls but of all mankind under the wide dome of heaven, has remained unaltered in me. As I then believed that there existed a little green stick whereon was written the message which would destroy all evil in men and give them universal welfare, so now I believe that such truth exists and will be revealed to men and will give them all its promises" (28, *The Life of Tolstoy*, Aylmer Maude). Christian anarchism exchanges all forms of authority for a single one; it leads toward a goal that Tolstoy believed was within means of everyone: equality among all people under the "wide dome of heaven". In exchange for the unity among all people, the price to pay is the end of individualism; the commitment to a life dedicated to others, like Alyosha the pot. To make his views credible, Tolstoy turned towards the most widespread and powerful means of uniting people, the belief in something that transcends all men: God.

Tolstoy describes the *Gospel in Brief* as "An investigation of the Christian teaching based [...] solely upon the words and the deeds ascribed to Christ by the four Gospels" (Intro to *Gospel in Brief*, 15-16). The object of the *Gospel in Brief* is to present a literal interpretation of the deeds and words of Jesus of Nazareth, the historical character. Jesus is identified not as he whom the Apostles identified as being, but as he whose life provides the best example to give meaning to humanity. Christ as the Son of God is transformed into Christ, the man who led an exemplary, moral life. Tolstoy sees Christ with the same criteria as Alyosha: by his work. This leads him to see Christianity as "the most convincing presentment of metaphysics and morals, the purest and



most complete doctrine of life, and the highest light which the human mind has ever reached; a doctrine from which all the noblest activities of humanity in politics, science, poetry, and philosophy instinctively derive themselves" (32, *Gospel in Brief*). Tolstoy affirms Christ's divinity which made Him universal to all men, but ultimately disregards it by turning Jesus the Son of God into Jesus, the moral example.

Alyosha's prayer with "his hands and with his heart" reflects Tolstoy's understanding of Christianity. One of his strongest attacks on the Russian Orthodox Church was its being controlled by people who did not believe in the religion they professed (i.e., that they did not believe in the religion Tolstoy professed). He defended that religion was controlled by the upper classes that used it to maintain their social and economic position. Miracles, tradition and rites were the Church's safeguard; they perpetuated their disinformation regarding the true teachings of the life of Jesus Christ to protect their position as leaders of the Church, knowing full well that these teachings would make men all equal and end the Church's authority. In his essay, "What is Religion, of What Does its Essence Consist?" Tolstoy writes: "One can use one's lips to say: 'I believe the world was created six thousand years ago', or: 'I believe in God the Father in three persons,' but no one can believe it all because the words make no sense. Therefore, the people of our world who profess a distorted form of Christianity do not actually believe in it" (96, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*). Many more essays like this one would have to be written to properly review and analyze Tolstoy's attack on the Russian

Orthodox Church. For the purposes of this essay, Alyosha's prayer "with hands and heart", I will review Tolstoy's story, "Three Hermits".

A bishop visits an island inhabited by three men who, according to the local people, are there to save their souls. The bishop asks the ferry to stop over at the island so that he can speak to them and aid them in their quest for salvation. When asked how they pray, the hermits reproduce it for the bishop, "Three are ye, three are we, have mercy upon us" (82, *Family Happiness*). The bishop then tries to teach them the Lord's Prayer, which they make the effort to learn by heart, verse by verse. Satisfied the bishop returns to the boat and proceeds with his journey, when, in the middle of the sea, a shining light is seen rapidly approaching. The hermits approach the boat by sea, "running upon the water" and tell the bishop that they have forgotten the prayer and if he could repeat it for them. In panic, after witnessing this miracle, the bishop crosses himself and leaning over the ship's side says, "Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God. It is not for me to teach you. Pray for us sinners." The bishop, to whom the hermits had bowed down to on the island, now reverses the roles and bows down to the three men whom he had regarded as simple, uneducated peasants.

In *A Confession* Tolstoy speaks of the faith of the peasants as more honest than that of the Church because it gives meaning to their life, it accords to the life of Christ. Of the peasants he writes: "In contrast to the people of our class who resist and curse the privations and sufferings of their lot, these people accept sickness and grief without question or protest, and with a calm and firm conviction that this is how it must be, that it cannot be otherwise and that it is all

for the good" (59, *A Confession*). The bishop's faith is based only on the supernatural, Tolstoy's on the willingness to follow the God within, the willingness to suffer. The bishop is the direct opposite of the *Gospel in Brief*, he believes only in the miracles, the resurrection and references to Jesus as the Son of God, all of which Tolstoy removed from this work. Of everything supernatural – not within reason – in the Gospel, Tolstoy says it is there only to convince the men who do not already believe in the divinity of Christ. In Tolstoy's view, the representatives of the Orthodox Church base their faith on empty words, which they use to convince themselves that they are Christians – they do not believe in the message of Jesus. A miracle, men running above water, is sufficient for the bishop to forget all the 'empty' words about the supernatural that he professes by memory. Having witnessed it he disregards the prayer he had taught the three hermits and transfers his faith onto them, "Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God. It is not for me to teach you. Pray for us sinners." Contrary to the bishop, and much like the hermits, Alyosha puts faith in the example of the life of Jesus Christ, in having suffered and loved. There is no reference to religious education in the story of Alyosha – this is in accordance with Tolstoy's belief that this knowledge, this purpose is natural to man. The hermits prayer, "Three are ye, three are we, have mercy upon us," is similar to Alyosha's prayer at his deathbed: "As it is good here when you obey and do no harm to others, so it will be there." Both resist any call to what is not of this world, recognizing that something else exists (as much as a rational account will allow, i.e. a vague description of something superior to them), but offering only their suffering and themselves in the search for salvation. Tolstoy finds true faith in the three hermits because they live a life closer to that of Jesus Christ, without luxuries, in

a deserted island, helping, through their love and suffering, the fishermen who happen to approach the island.

Tolstoy advocates equality through the adoption of Alyosha's stance to life, subduing life toward a cause: work, suffering, love for fellow man. These are all characteristics Tolstoy identified in the peasants (and attributed to Christ), which is why he asked the aristocracy to live like the peasants as the solution to the inequality between men. This is the reason why Tolstoy gave up (very late in life) smoking, alcohol and meat – not necessarily because they were bad for his health as much as because they were unnecessary for his survival. The reason why peasants have to toil like slaves is because the aristocracy lives with unnecessary luxuries. Recalling Tolstoy's view of the ant-hill gone wrong (above), only when the ants that have so much more become willing to give up the power that their surplus awards them, will peasants be able to live a decent life. The power to change society is not in the peasants, it is in the ruling classes. Tolstoy acknowledges how difficult a task this is, but he is convinced that, given the right circumstances, the ruling classes would recognize their equality to all men.

Social equality between all men, Tolstoy advocates, is not the 'norm'. Society is traditionally corrupted and the Church is regarded as responsible. The Church has achieved this inequality through exclusive interpretation of the meaning of Christ. It would take a reversal of the tradition that has guaranteed the Church's position of authority to operate a change of allegiance from the Church to Tolstoy, and the first step is to deny the Church's divine right to the meaning of Christ. This is what *Gospel in Brief* attempts to do, to offer a new

interpretation of the source of the Church's authority, "I was brought into doubt as to the justness of the reply given to me by the wisdom of men of my own station, and I tried once more to understand what answer it is that Christianity gives to those men who live a life with meaning" (22-23, *The Gospel in Brief*). As the interpreter of Christianity, Tolstoy sets himself up in a position to provide a new direction to humanity. To do this he accepts Christianity, he accepts tradition, and uses his privileged access, ultimately based on the same authority as the Church, to provide a new exclusive interpretation under the guise of its universality – professing it accessible to all men. The Church's teaching is thus substituted by moral guidelines, the organization of life from within; the Church has exclusive access to the path to heaven, Tolstoy to the path into our inner selves. The 'Kingdom of God is in heaven' is substituted by the 'Kingdom of God is within us all': two different paths, two different destinations, two different guides, the same basis of authority.<sup>17</sup> How one will realize Tolstoy's truth is similar to how young Nikolenka in *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* realizes the purpose to life as moral perfection: coming face to face with death.

This is expressed in the story *Master and Man*, where it takes a terrible snowstorm and the inevitability of death to join Vasili Andreyevich, the master, to Nikita, the man. Vasili Andreyevich, accompanied by Nikita, is on his way to buy land when they get caught in a snowstorm. Although they are able to reach a village, Vasili Andreyevich does not want to stop for the night because he is afraid the price will go up the next day. They leave the village and get lost again, but this time they are stranded in a field, unable to move. As Tolstoy makes clear it is the master who is responsible for the situation, as it is the ruling classes that

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<sup>17</sup> The subject is the same. What 'Kingdom of God' means differs.

are responsible for injustice in society. Covered in snow, with no visibility, certain to die, Vasili leaves Nikita behind and tries to save himself. Unable to do so, he is forced to return to the sledge where Nikita has decided to endure the snowstorm, accepting that he may live or die. Only when faced with certain death does Vasili Andreyevich recognize Nikita as a human being and decides to save him: "Vasili Andreyevich stood silent and motionless for half a minute. Then suddenly, with the same resolution with which he used to strike hands when making a good purchase, he took a step back and turning up his sleeves began raking the snow off Nikita and out of the sledge. Having done this he hurriedly undid his girdle, opened out his fur coat, and having pushed Nikita down, lay on top of him, covering him not only with his fur coat but with the whole of his body, which glowed with warmth. [...] 'There, and you say you are dying! Lie still and get warm, that's our way...'" (196-197, "Master and Man", *Family Happiness and Other Stories*, Tolstoy). Man, Tolstoy believes, is 'naturally' good and knows by instinct that all men are equal, it is society that has corrupted him and led him away from the truth; it takes the advent of death, the elimination all unnecessary conventions, the return to the 'natural' self, to make Man realize the brotherhood of all men. In the end they find Nikita alive with Vasili Andreyevich frozen to death on top of him. Only the acknowledgement of the combined fates of master and man can resolve the conflict between rich and poor and create justice in the society.

In the beginning of this essay I quoted part of a diary entry: "Only a person who considers himself free can submit to other people. A person who does what he wants considers himself free; but a person who does what he wants is a slave of everything." The entry continues: "The only person who *is* free

is the one who considers himself a slave of God, and only does what God wants and that nobody and nothing can prevent" November 9, 1906 (402, *Tolstoy's Diaries*). To become a slave of a God is to be like God, but once Christ becomes a man then it is not we who become like God, but god who becomes like us. And thus, we return to the Caucasus with Olenin, a slave of reason forever living in a foreign clime.

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